

### Freeze Ups –

Keep running your water until the notice is given to stop! It will take time for the ground to warm up and the melted snow actually makes pipes more susceptible to freezing. It will be interesting to find out what the costs of running water and clearing freeze ups is this year. The process has progressed to replacement of galvanized lines where necessary. While frozen pipes are an inconvenience to go through, Department of Public Works (DPW) staff worked long hours in difficult conditions to provide service. Bottled water was made available and the Municipal Marina was opened to permit showers and use of restroom facilities. I still feel an earlier notice would have lessened the freeze ups, but most people ignore the notice (only 30% ran water last year). The process overloads the sewage treatment facility (and can cause septic system problems for those not on city sewer) the longer it goes on, and the city dies incur expense for pumping and treating the water, but it's generally more cost effective than the time consuming process of thawing lines (that requires a lot of overtime). Hopefully we've learned some lessons these past two years that we can take forward.

### Water Meters \_

The issue gets more and more intense as we go on. Department of Public Works staff are still working to understand the full nature of it; radio reads, software, data entry all seem to play into the under charging. At least 1 of the frozen lines reported resulted in the discovery of NO meter installed (possibly for a very long time). Action is being taken to identify the issues and resolve them. I'm not posting numbers, but will when they are available and verified. Every aspect of this situation will be investigated and the city needs to make sure a system of checks and balances is put in place to prevent make sure all users are properly billed and insure rates are not increased in place of failure to collect the proper revenue from all who benefit from the distribution system.

### Budget –

Some long term spending practices will hopefully come to an end this year (don't amount to significant savings – but it all adds up to more for streets and other real priorities). Once challenged and brought into public debate some things will be hard to defend. Ramsdell, Paine Pool, and Marina subsidies will again be on the agenda. Two of those are City owned facilities, and the majority of the subsidy is to pay loan installments (the Ramsdell and Paine Pool are operating subsidies also). Council gets the City Manager budget late this month and there will be a series of Public hearings – please attend and voice your opinion on what you feel the priorities should be – it's your money. I've already been getting telephone calls and emails ([ismith@manisteemi.gov](mailto:ismith@manisteemi.gov)) from taxpayers – this process is to be completed by May 15<sup>th</sup> by City Charter (adopted) and there is a lot to look at.

### Accountability –

I will do my best to hold our City managers accountable for their actions and results. It can't happen with only two or three council members – it takes at least four (a majority). Make your opinions known to all of City Council – we are elected “at large,” not just to serve the precinct we reside in. I get feedback from those who agree and those have a different opinion. I try to provide feedback to all who communicate with me. There are many hours of research involved in most agenda items addressed by City Council and issues brought to light by taxpayers, and I'll gladly share that information and make documents available for your convenience.

Agenda?

A better City to Live in, Work in, and enjoy – simple as that. Providing prompt service for those who elected me (or voted against me) is important to me, and it is always rewarding to be able to help someone who has an issue with City service or some other issue.

Filer Township Sewer –

This is a long lived story – dating back to the prior City Manager. Last July, City Council got letters from Filer Township indicated a “stalemate” in negotiations with the City Manager – and asking for their assistance in moving the negotiations forward – none responded. In September, Filer Township posted a notice in the Manistee and Ludington newspapers stating the Manistee offer was not economically feasible and calling negotiations “ended.” Filer Township then began negotiating with Little River as an alternate provider for the service, and came to a published conceptual agreement in January. The City made a counter offer to the Little River agreement – but Filer Township rejected it. A second offer to restart negotiations was mailed in February, signed by the Mayor – and also rejected. Our current offer is at a better price than offered by Little River and with less “capital cost” and efforts are being made to reopen negotiations. There is a sense of urgency, as Filer Township has applied for a USDA grant to cover part of the Little River agreement cost and the proposed route of the line could put the City’s major customer, Oaks Correctional Facility, in jeopardy. The Oaks represents 30% of the City water and sewer revenue, and that would be hard to make up without significant hardship in rate increases. If you have friends in Filer Township, encourage them to consider an option that will reduce their overall cost. I have a real sense that the offer most recently made would have been accepted years ago, as it is considerably less than any previous offer. I don’t think the City ever considered Little River a viable contender for this service and negotiated from a “best value to the City” rather than a partner community standpoint. As cost for services increase for essential government services, neighboring communities need to pool resources to keep and high level of service and control those costs.

No Comment?

Don’t be shocked by my use of “no comment” to media in the future – it is annoying to be “sound bite” quoted or partially quoted (edited) when ask for comments. I’ll mostly refer media to my web-site for additional thought, which they are welcome to use. All I do and say with other Council Members and City Staff (through email or text) is discoverable under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and what goes on in Council Meetings (and most Committee Meetings) is also public information. The Open Meeting Act (OMA) is another tool that makes sure decisions are debated and decided in a public format (not decided behind closed doors, except where provided for by law). The OMA mostly applies between members of the governing body – not in private or public meetings with constituents. My flow of information is unhindered with the public and it is great hearing from you and applying your input to the operation of our City.

City Manager Separation Agreement –

The only remaining member of City Council who extended the agreement from 6 months of salary and benefits to 12 months is Mayor Kenney. Only one member voted against it at the time (Scrimger) and a single citizen, Rick Schrock, spoke out concerning it at the meeting it was considered. The council in 2012 thought (according to the Mayor, 9-4-2012 Council Agenda/Minutes attached) it provided the

manager with “security.” It made any effort to replace the manager expensive – almost like a shroud of invincibility – but 5 of the 6 council members who offered that costly package are gone, leaving those who replaced them to pay for their decision. The average tenure of a City Manager is 6 to 7 years – and most communities “refresh” for a new point of view or a different style of management. We have some very significant challenges (opportunities) in front of us and it will take time to address them – but there will be focus on real priorities and essential services the City provides. The vote to accept the separation agreement with a date of April 3, 2015 was 5 for and 2 against. It will cost the City approximately \$125,000 in separation costs. The only way to avoid that was for Mr. Diesch to resign (with 30 day notice), otherwise the existing agreement was in force until he agreed to other terms in a new agreement. I wish Mitch and his family well and appreciate his improvements to the City during his tenure. I felt it was time for new leadership and management and believe Mitch will find success in his next endeavor.